

-- Senator Jim Jeffords' Dispatch From DC --
- Volume 2, Issue 3 -

February 2006

Dear Vermonters,

Welcome to another issue of ***Dispatch From DC***, my electronic newsletter about my work on Vermont's behalf in the United States Senate.

As I reflect on the Senate's work last year, though I am proud of some legislative victories, I continue to be disappointed with the priorities of the Republican leadership on Capitol Hill. While giving away another round of reckless new tax cuts in 2005, Congress again added billions of dollars to the national debt and shortchanged critical support for those most in need. Heating assistance for low-income Americans, health care for the poor and elderly, and support for special education are just a few of the important federal commitments that were not adequately funded by Congress. Unfortunately, in his recent State of the Union, President Bush missed an opportunity to properly address the federal government's financial woes and misplaced priorities.

Despite the failures of 2005, it is my hope that Congress will embark on a more responsible track in 2006. Regardless, please be assured I will continue to fight for Vermont's priorities in Washington. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Senate to better protect the environment and our natural resources, minimize soaring energy prices, improve our public schools, and address a host of other issues important to Vermonters.

If you have any questions about ***Dispatch From DC*** or any other issues, please feel free to e-mail me at vermont@jeffords.senate.gov, visit my website at jeffords.senate.gov, or call my office at (800) 835-5500.

Sincerely,



Senator Jim Jeffords

*Please feel free to forward ***Dispatch From DC*** to any other interested Vermonters.*

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A Victory for Vermont's Dairy Farmers!

Earlier this week, Congress approved a two-year extension of the Milk Income Loss Contract (MILC) Program as part of the agriculture budget package. I commend and applaud the Senate Agriculture Committee members for their work on behalf of Vermont's family dairy farmers. As all Vermonters understand, family dairies are a unique way of life today in the Green Mountain State and an important part of our heritage. Dairy farmers are proud stewards of their land and Vermont's landscape. During times of low milk prices, the first to bear the extra burdens are the family farmers. The MILC Program gives dairies the support they need when milk prices are low and when economic times are tough. This extension will expire with the other provisions of the 2002 Farm Bill and will require reauthorization in 2007.

Working to Lower Energy Bills

As Vermonters continue to work through the winter months, I remain committed addressing the rising costs of heating oil. I am concerned that while working families and businesses have had to cope with record fuel prices recently, the profits of oil companies have soared. I continue to seek increased funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), an important program for low-income and middle-income Vermont families. Additionally, Senator Leahy, Congressman Sanders, and I recently wrote a letter to President Bush requesting that he direct the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the Department of Energy (DOE), the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, and the Department of Justice (DOJ) to issue regulations to protect consumers from price gouging, and to address the lack of transparency in the oil and gasoline markets. I will continue to work with my Senate colleagues to alleviate the unacceptable burden currently placed on Vermont's families by these high energy costs.

Rethinking the Strategy in Iraq

Mounting American casualties in Iraq have saddened all of us and compelled a reexamination of the war. That reflection has prompted a shift in the focus of the debate. At last we are beginning to talk about what we are doing there and how we can get our military out. I voted against going to war in Iraq, but once it was launched, I believed we had no choice but to stay until we helped the Iraqi people set a steady course for themselves. It is increasingly clear to me, however, that the only way the Iraqi people are going to be able to set that steady course is if the U.S. tells the Iraqi people and the American people that it is time for us to start planning our withdrawal. The administration needs to send the clear message that we do not plan on being the principle military force in that country much longer and that Iraqis must chart a transition to security independence. Stability in Iraq will only be achieved when sovereignty is clear and the volatile American presence is not the defining political and security issue.

We owe it to the Iraqi people to stick with them in the reconstruction of their country, and I believe that is best accomplished by turning over the military mission to the Iraqis as quickly as possible. We owe it to our soldiers, who have performed their missions exceptionally well, to avoid staying a day longer than we have to. They fought for the right of Iraqis to control their own destinies. We must not fail in that mission. I look forward to the intense focus on this issue that I expect will continue. We have a chance to finally do the right thing by both the Iraqi people and our men and women in uniform.

Protecting Vermonters from International Paper's Tire Burn

For the last eight years, International Paper (IP) in Ticonderoga, NY has sought to offset its energy costs by burning tires for fuel. While I understand IP's economic reasoning, its current permit proposals do not include the emissions controls needed to protect the environment and people downwind from the plant in Vermont. I believe IP can afford the industry-standard technology necessary to protect the public health and limit the air pollution that results from burning tires. I have worked extensively with the State of Vermont, the State of New York, the Environmental Protection Agency, and with International Paper to ensure that IP acts responsibly and invests in the needed technology. In November, I introduced the Tire Derived Fuel Safety Act, S. 2011. This bill would ensure that Americans who live downwind from pulp and paper mills that burn tires for fuel are protected from the harmful pollution that results from doing so without the proper air emission controls. In the meantime, I am closely monitoring the status of the proposed tire burn at the IP's Ticonderoga, NY mill.

Ensuring a Fair and Qualified Supreme Court

Due to the passing of Chief Justice Rehnquist and the retirement of Justice O'Connor, the Senate has considered nominations to the United States Supreme Court for the first time in eleven years. Given the importance of the Supreme Court's decisions to the lives of all Americans, and that these positions are for the life of the nominee, I have spent a great deal of time the last few months reviewing these nominees. I supported the confirmation of Judge John Roberts, who was confirmed as the seventeenth Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court in September. I concluded that Judge Roberts would use the law, not his ideological or personal beliefs, and the Constitution to make his judicial decisions. My full statement on Judge Roberts' nomination can be found at the following web address:

http://jeffords.senate.gov/~jeffords/press/05/09/092805roberts_vote.html

In October, President Bush nominated Judge Samuel Alito to fill the position created by the retirement of Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. Earlier this week, I voted against the nomination of Judge Samuel Alito. While Judge Alito is clearly qualified and

capable of serving on the high court, I believe our country would be ill-served by his judicial philosophy at this critical point in time. My full statement on Judge Alito's nomination can be found at the following web address:

<http://jeffords.senate.gov/~jeffords/press/06/01/012606alitovote.html>

Helping Military Families With Overseas Deployments

In October, I introduced with Senator Russ Feingold, D-Wis., the Military Family Support Act of 2005 to help military families struggling with the long-term absence of a family member deployed overseas.

When a member of the armed forces is activated and deployed, family structures are severely affected. The day-to-day responsibilities of a family are, in many cases, more than a one-person job. Any absence, especially an absence of more than several months due to a deployment overseas, can be debilitating to family life. The Military Family Support Act makes previously earned leave time more useful during stressful times for military families. The bill requires the Office of Personnel Management to design a program for federal employees who have been designated "caregivers" by the armed forces to use their leave time in a more flexible manner. The bill also requires the Department of Labor to help private businesses interested in making leave policy more accommodating for their employees. The goal of the Military Family Support Act is to make life a little easier for those who are already giving so much to our country and to their communities.

Continuing the Fight for Cleaner Air

Last spring, I successfully led the fight to defeat the Bush Administration's "Clear Skies" initiative. I strongly opposed this legislation because it would have loosened the standards of the existing Clean Air Act, permitted increased air pollution from coal-fired power plants, and harmed human health by increasing emissions of mercury, a pollutant that causes developmental health problems in children. I asked for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to compare Clear Skies to my bill, the Clean Power Act (S. 150), and other competing multi-pollutant air legislation. I am proud to report that the EPA found that my bill would lead to the highest reductions of mercury pollution and the greatest health benefits. Though negotiations involving this legislation have been stalled thus far, I look forward to continuing my efforts to protect public health by establishing stronger pollution controls so we can all breathe cleaner air.

Keeping Vermont's Water Resources Clean

As the 400th Anniversary of the discovery of Lake Champlain approaches, we should be reminded of the importance of Vermont's water resources. I continue to

support efforts to keep Lake Champlain and Vermont's waterways clean. In the recently passed federal Highway Bill, I secured \$6 million for Vermont to provide financial assistance to towns, cities, and villages around the state for projects to reduce storm water pollution from highways and roads. I also recently introduced a bill (S. 2054) directing the U.S. Geological Survey to conduct a survey of Vermont's groundwater resources. This study would be the first comprehensive look at Vermont's groundwater resources and it will be an important step to protecting Vermont's water supplies. I am also working with my colleagues on the Environment and Public Works Committee to pass legislation to prevent the introduction of invasive species, such as Asian carp, into our nation's waters. I look forward to working in the coming year to ensure that these bills become law.

Protecting Your Identity

I hear from many Vermonters who are concerned about identity theft and stolen personal financial information. One good way to protect yourself from identity theft is to know more about your individual credit rating to guard against unauthorized transactions made in your name. The Congress recently amended the Fair Credit Reporting Act to help individuals keep better track of their personal financial transactions by providing their credit report, free of charge, once each year.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) provides consumers with useful information and tips on consumer protection on their Web site, which you can visit at <http://www.ftc.gov>. For more information about requesting a free credit report, please visit the FTC online at <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/edcams/credit/index.html> or call toll-free at (877) 322-8228.

Happy Birthday IDEA!

On November 29th, 2005 we marked the 30th Anniversary of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the federal special education law. IDEA is one of the key pieces of civil rights and education legislation to be enacted in the last several decades. I was a freshman in Congress when my subcommittee took up the task of crafting legislation that would bring children with disabilities out of institutions and into schools. By bringing children with disabilities into a mainstream educational experience, we have helped to bring them into the mainstream of American life. Many of those children have grown up to go to college, get jobs, pay taxes, and have families of their own. I have spent most of my career fighting for full funding of special education. While we have seen much progress, a great deal of work remains to be done. None of that should take away from what has been accomplished by this durable law and the remarkable children it has assisted in the last 30 years. Happy birthday IDEA! Here's hoping for many more!